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ABSTRACT

This booklet accompanied a 1991 exhibition of migrant arts, mounted by CAMPS (Creative Artists Migrant Program Services) and an ongoing program of collection and documentation research on migrant folk arts at the BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center. There are four passages in migrant lives: through historical time, through space, through the seasons of nature, and through the cycles of life. This exhibit traces passages in the arts of four migrant groups: Mexican, Algonquin Native, Haitian, and African Americans. African American migrant art celebrates the passage of historical time out of Africa though slavery to freedom. Today ancient African traditions are adapted to life on the migrant stream, as wood found on the way is carved into walking canes--symbols of traditional authority--and camp rappers and poets emulate traditional African praise singers. Haitian art evokes the passage by water in carefully detailed drawings of boats, which are also a powerful protective Voodoo symbol. Other protective spiritual images found in Haitian art are the skeletal male figure with split color hands and checkerboard patterns of vivid colors. Algonquin art celebrates nature and the turn of the seasons, and includes woodcarvings of images of the bush and floral designs on baskets, beadwork, and embroidery. Mexican and Mexican-American art, often related to ceremonies marking passage through the life cycle, includes decorations of flowers and cut and folded paper as well as leathercraft and paintings. (SV)

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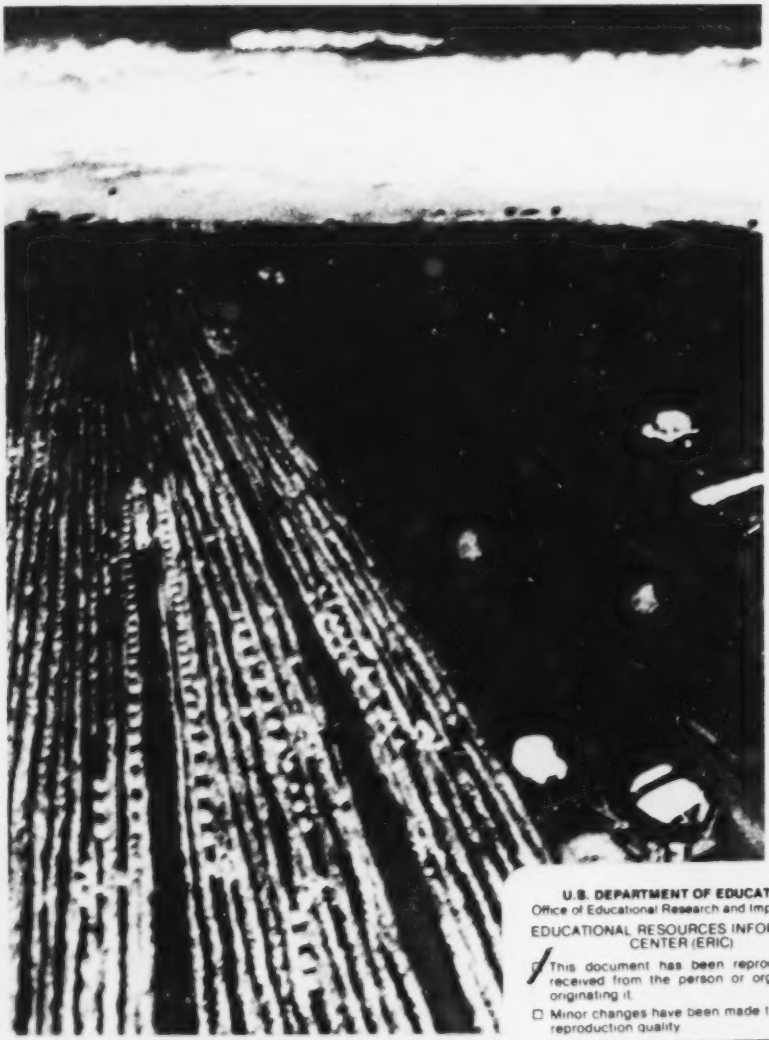
PASSAGES



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PASSAGES

A Celebration of Migrant Arts

A Guide to the Exhibition

by

Sue Roark-Calnek, Ph.D., Curator

CAMPS/Folk Arts Program
Livingston-Steuben-Wyoming
BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the help of many people who made this exhibition possible. They include:

The New York State Council on the Arts/Folk Arts, Literature, and Special Arts Services Programs; Poets & Writers; and the New York Foundation for the Arts, for supporting earlier research on which the present exhibition is based.

Bob Lynch, Director of the BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center, and Sylvia Kelly, Coordinator of the Center's CAMPS/Folk Arts Program, for their tireless efforts on behalf of migrant farmworkers.

Contributing researchers for the exhibition sections: Juana Camacho (Mexican/Mexican American), Dr. Rose-Marie Chierici (Haitian American), Dr. Sue Roark-Calnek (Algonquin Native American), and Dr. Mary Arnold Twining (African American).

Maureen Harding, who produced a splendid design for the exhibition, and Carl Shanahan and his students in Exhibition Design at SUNY Geneseo, who helped with its preparation and mounting.

Mary Fink and Juan Huerta, who ably assisted Sylvia Kelly and Sue Roark-Calnek with the catalog layout. Juan Huerta also photographed artwork for the catalog.

Will Wadsworth of The Pictures Framer, who matted photos and texts for the exhibit.

The photographers whose work is featured in the exhibition: Elizabeth Boettger, Bill Cronin, Deborah Fazackerley, Michael Greenlar, and Roger Smith.

And most of all, the farmworkers who have shared with us their skills, their knowledge, and their lives. The present exhibition can present only a small part of what we have learned from them. Our deep appreciation goes out to the people whose labor sustains us all. Muchas gracias, mèsi anpil, kitcî mîgwetc: thank you!

Sue Roark-Calnek

INTRODUCTION

There are four passages in migrant lives:

– through **historical time**, anchored in the past while reaching for the future;

– through **space**, over the sea, across national frontiers, on the migrant stream;

– through the **seasons of nature**, on the land they travel and work;

– through the **cycles of life**, in family and community.

This exhibit traces passages in the arts of four migrant groups: Mexican, Algonquin Native, Haitian, and African Americans. The passages are common to all migrant people. The pieces shown here highlight, for each group, one passage that receives particular expression and value in their art.

Passages in historical time have left their traces on migrant arts: in the African roots of Haitian and African American art, the traditional skills of Algonquin craftwork, and the diverse Indian and Spanish cultures on which Mexican artisans draw. In each case, traditional arts have been transformed in ways that reflect complex histories of conquest or enslavement and survival. For migrant workers, the arts have been further adapted to contemporary life on the migrant stream

Moving through space, across political and geographical boundaries, migrants must travel light. They carry their traditions in their minds and speak them in words. Materials are used as they find them; art forms are fitted to new settings. Still, the arts serve as powerful, even protective, reminders of

home.

Migrants move with the seasons, intimately knowing the land that they work. More than most workers today, they respect the feel of the earth in their hands, the blessing and bite of the weather, the changes in plant and animal life. This respect is reflected in artists' choices of materials and techniques. Their labor binds them to the land for a season, and then they move on.

Most migrants return to "homebase" communities in the American South and Southwest, the Canadian North, and Mexico. In the supportive community environment of the homebase, there can flourish the private and public ceremonies that move people through the cycle of life. In turn, the ceremonies renew a sense of community connecting people with their past. Traditional arts provide color and form to the ceremonies of family and community renewal.

The artists whose work you will see are, like all artists everywhere, creators. They work with tradition, but they also impress upon it their own particular vision and personal style. We honor their creative vision as much as their cultural roots.

AFRICAN AMERICANS

African American migrants in Western New York State work in a variety of vegetables and fruits. In the past, they were often employed on potato farms, where the pieces shown here were collected.

Their art celebrates the passage of historical time, out of Africa through slavery to freedom. Ancient African traditions nourished the will to survive. Today they are adapted to life on the migrant stream, in words that travel the hard road from Florida to New York and back, in wood found on the way and carved into forms that recall the African past.

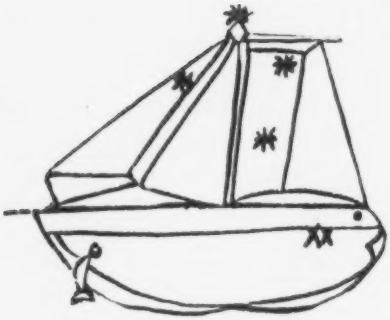
The sky serpent or rainbow snake in West African art is an ancient symbol connecting heaven with earth and water. It appears here on a carved stick and walking canes. Canes or wands in Africa are symbols of traditional authority. In the migrant camp, the cane asserts prideful identity and street-smart sophistication.

Camp rappers and poets continue the tradition of African praise singers, "men of words" who construct and celebrate reputations by their verbal artistry. They tell their stories of life on the stream in words sometimes tender, sometimes tough, always moving.

I Work Too Hard" is an extract from a long rap session and musical performance. The poems were collected from poetry writing workshops conducted in migrant camps.

The faces of African American farmworkers are, like their words, sometimes tender, sometimes tough, always moving. They are captured indelibly in strong photographic images that also provide documentation of the way it was, and sometimes still is, "goin' on the season".

As AfricanAmerican migrants have traveled the stream, they have striven to affirm lives of value, for themselves and their children. The rapper asserts bravely that "when I get to work, it ain't the end of my game". His passage through history, from slavery to freedom and toward real equality, continues.



HAITIAN AMERICANS

Passages through space, over the sea, brought waves of Haitian "boat people" to America, as refugee immigrants soon to become migrants. They have harvested potatoes and apples in Western New York, although many no longer travel up from Florida for the "season".

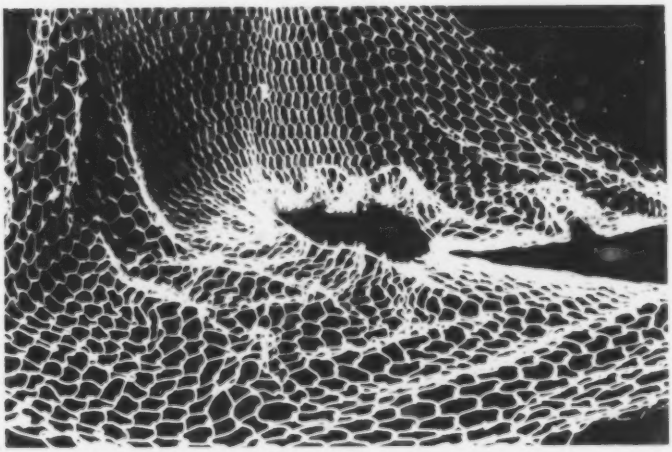
Haitians fled political repression, instability and poverty in search of a better life. Still, they remember the way home to Haiti in strongly felt, brilliantly colored artwork.

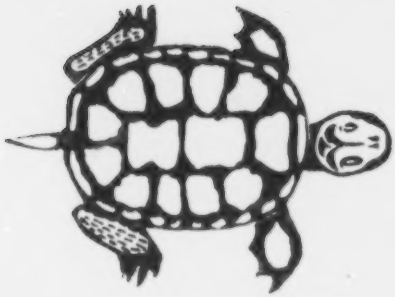
Passage by water is evoked in carefully detailed drawings of boats. For Haitian immigrants who were once fishermen, the boat also represents work; the sea and the rivers are rich sources of life and livelihood. Seine nets like the one shown are pulled by teams of men wading through streams .

In the context of the religion called Vodou, the boat is the vèvè or symbol of Agwé, the god of the sea: a powerful invocation of protection by spiritual forces in an uncertain world. When Haitians first arrived at farms in Western New York, some drew boats on the walls of their camps. Other protective images appear in the skeletal male figure whose

enlarged forward foot and split-color hands guard against spiritual danger. Checkerboard colors break up visual patterns to confuse and repel evil doers. They can also be seen in a kite and traditional peasant housefronts. In this way, Haitian art embraces and sanctifies ordinary things.

Vodou and other forms of Haitian popular culture have deep roots in the African past. Like African Americans, all Haitians have ancestors who experienced the "Middle Passage" of the slave ships across the Atlantic from Africa. Like the Creole language spoken by most Haitian immigrants, their culture drew as well on the legacy of the French who once ruled Haiti. Today, the vivid palette and striking forms of Haitian art inspire artists in Europe and America. History comes full circle.





ALGONQUINS

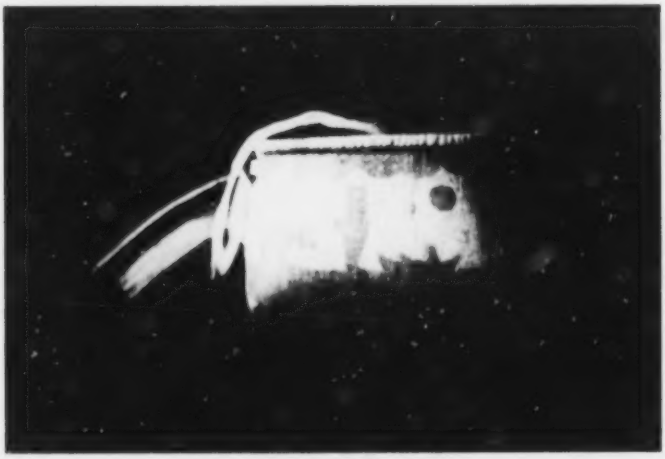
Algonquin Native Americans from Western Quebec are migrant mink skinners on Western New York fur farms. Their work applies skills learned in hunting and trapping in the nokimak, the northern Canadian forest or "bush", where their lives traditionally followed a passage through seasons of nature. The work shown here comes from the Barriere Lake Band of Algonquins now settled at Rapid Lake, Province of Quebec.

Algonquin artisans recognize and respect the turn of the seasons. Birch bark peeled at the right season can be made into baskets and decorated by scratching. There is a time for tanning hides for summer moccasins, a time for making winter boots and mitts.

The large wooodcarvings displayed here present elegant images of the bush: the moose and other animals hunted for food, hides and fur. Floral designs on baskets or in beadwork and embroidery honor the medicine plants that sustain human and animal life.

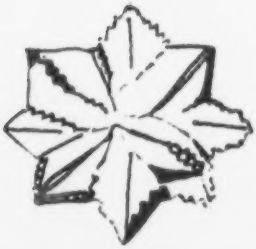
In the traditional Algonquin creation story, the earth is formed on the back of a great turtle; North America itself is "Turtle

Island". The plates on a turtle's shell are a calendar marking the passage of days and months. At seasonal feasts through the year, Algonquin families renew their relationship with the earth.



As Algonquins move with the seasons over the land, they travel light. A hunter on snowshoes can walk through the bush "like a rabbit", it is said. Babies were once wrapped in rabbitskin robes for travel. They are often still tied in easily portable carriers or cradleboards. Cradleboards stood upright allow the child to observe what adults do, learning by watching.

The Algonquin child will grow up in a world that is rapidly changing. Clear-cut logging and economic development threaten the bush; the market for animal furs is declining. The traders who once bartered guns and beads for furs are gone. Like other migrants, Algonquins face an uncertain future with courage and hope.



MEXICANS AND MEXICAN AMERICANS

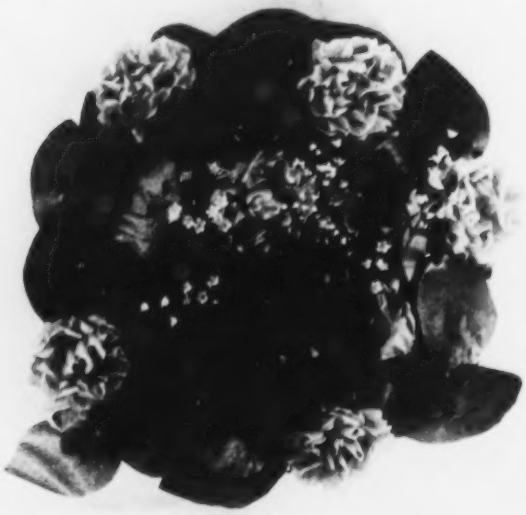
Most migrant farmworkers in Western New York are now of Mexican heritage. They come to this area to cut lettuce or harvest cabbage, onións, or beans. Teams of skilled lettuce cutters move across fields with speed and precision. Other crops are harvested by close-knit family crews.

Mexican workers cross la frontera, the border, to work in the United States. For Mexican Americans, la frontera is more than a line in space; it is a way of connecting with a proud cultural heritage.

At homebases in Florida, California,Texas, or Mexico, folk traditions flourish in ceremonies marking passage through the cycles of life: fiestas marking the annual church calendar or stages in life from birth through death. The ceremonies renew social ties within families and communities. For a quinceañera or girl's 15th birthday, many godparents share in a family's joy and assist with the expenses of the celebration.

For these joyful or solemn occasions, Mexican artisans fold and cut paper to create piñatas, streamers, and floral decorations. The tradition draws on Mexico's twin cultural roots, in Catholic Spain and Native America. In the religions of ancient Mexico, flowers were symbols of impermanent beauty, the never-ending cycle of life and death. Senderos

de pétalos (pathways of petals) are still strewn on the Day of the Dead.



In the norteño culture of northern Mexico, traditional leathercraft is imaginatively applied to animal parts in making practical tools for work on ranches and farms. The whips combine deer feet with alligator and tortoise skin. The deer antler, carried on a saddle pommel by a ranch worker, becomes a rope frayer, corn husker, or weapon of self defense as the situation demands.

The paintings of Juan Cavazos portray farms and farm labor in glowing colors. In its grand scale and strong social message, his work echoes the great muralista tradition of modern Mexican art. But Juan's vision is very much his own.

AND THE PASSAGE CONTINUES...

The exhibit closes with images of passage through the lives of migrant farmworkers. The accompanying texts celebrate migrant life and labor in the words of the founder and first director of the BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center, Dr. Gloria Mattera. Like her, we pay tribute to:

* the hard work that often begins for migrant children before they are born;

* the hard work that continues for toddlers and pre-schoolers who still lack daycare facilities;

* the hard work done by school-age children like Juan, work needed for their family's survival;

* the hard work that results in a high dropout rate for migrant youth like David;

* the hard work that only begins in the fields for migrant women like Cruz, and must continue at home with care for her family;

* the hard work, making us the best fed nation on earth, that is performed by men and women all too often forgotten by our society.

LIVINGSTON-STEUBEN-WYOMING BOCES GENESEO MIGRANT CENTER

The BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center serves migrant farmworkers in a six-county area of Western New York State. Founded in 1968 by Dr. Gloria Mattera, the Center now operates under the auspices of the Livingston-Steuben-Wyoming Board of Cooperative Educational Services. It works closely with other area migrant programs to coordinate and staff educational, health, cultural, and recreational services for migrants.

Center staff have acted as advocates for migrant farmworkers by speaking out on their behalf at the local, state, and national levels. The Center has conducted research addressing a number of national issues, including alcoholism among migrant farmworkers, secondary education, and parental involvement.. Commencing with Project Child, validated in 1973 as an exemplary program by the U.S. Office of Education, the Center has given special attention to comprehensive programs addressing migrant needs in family and community settings.

CAMPS (Creative Artists Migrant Program Services) began in 1975, with funding through the Arts Council.for Wyoming County. In 1982, a program of collection and documentation research on migrant folk arts was added, with support from the New York State Council on the Arts, Folk Arts Program. Since 1982, CAMPS/Folk Arts has mounted interpreted exhibitions and performances of migrant arts, with active participation from migrant artists and visiting scholars.

PASSAGES: A Celebration of Migrant Arts
Sponsored by BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center
National Conference On Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers
April 29 - May 1, 1991

EXHIBITION PIECES

African American

1. "Cold"
Group Poem, Kemp Robinson Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1978
2. Photograph by Roger Smith
Hunter Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1973
3. "Sadness"
Troy Parks, Smith Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1977
4. Photograph by Elizabeth Boettger
Finch Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1982
5. "Love Me Blues"
Group Poem, Smith Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1977
6. Photograph by Elizabeth Boettger
Brown Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1982
7. "Following A Dream"
Group Poem, Kemp Robinson Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1978
8. Photograph by Elizabeth Boettger
Finch Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1982
9. "I Work Too Hard" (Rap)
Ronnie Walker, Moore Camp, Livingston Co., NY 1986
10. Photograph by Elizabeth Boettger
Moore Camp, Livingston Co., NY 1986
11. "Snake on a Bough". Carved wood with varnish and ink
Otis Green, Wells Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1985
12. Cane. Carved wood with varnish and rhinestones
James Scrivens, Smith Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1984
13. Cane. Carved wood with stain and varnish
James Scrivens, Smith Camp
14. - 19. Six photographs by Bill Cronin and Michael Greenlar
Migrant camps in Wyoming and Steuben Cos., NY 1976 - 1979

Haitian American

1. Photograph by Michael Greenlar
Hardy Road Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1983

2. "Les Poissons". Pastels on paper
Marie L. Stanford, Hoehandle Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1985
3. Seine net. Cotton twine
Elius Sylvestre, Lyndonville Camp, Orleans Co., NY 1985
4. Photograph by Michael Greenlar
Cité de Soleil, Haiti 1990
5. "Boat". Pen and ink on paper
Charles LaMarre, Hoehandle Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1985
6. "Haitian Bateau". Pastels on paper
Louis J. Brifil, Hoehandle Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1985
7. "Vodou Man". Pastels on paper
Cantave Sean, Hoehandle Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1985
8. "Kite Flying". Pastels on paper
Louis J. Brifil, Hoehandle Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1985
9. "House". Pastels on paper
Sean Cantave, Hoehandle Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1985
10. "House". Pastels on paper
Sele Polepi, Hoehandle Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1985
11. "House". Pastels on paper
Delva Richelieu, Hoehandle Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1985
12. "National Bank". Pastels on paper
Frido Mondestin, Hoehandle Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1985
13. - 18. Six photographs by Michael Greenlar
Miami, FL and Hardy Road Camp, Wyoming Co., NY 1983

Algonquin

1. Winter boots. Deerhide with beadwork
Barbara Poucachiche, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1985
2. Mitts. Duffel, with embroidery and moosehide trim
Nellie Ratt, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1985
3. Mitts. Deerhide with silk embroidery and fur trim
Mina Brascoupe, Bennett Farm, Ontario Co., NY 1987
4. Snowshoes. Wood with varnish and babiche
Frank Thusky, Saxby Farm, Ontario Co., NY 1976
5. Photograph by Michael Greenlar
Rapid Lake, Quebec 1988
6. Rabbitskin blanket. Twined rabbitskin strips
Lena Nottaway, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1987
7. Photograph by Michael Greenlar
Rapid Lake, Quebec 1988

8. Cradleboard. Wood with cloth cover and deerhide thong
Alphonse Rodgers and Mary Jane Nottaway, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1988
9. Baby dress. Cloth with rickrack
Gracey Ratt Jerome, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1988
10. Baby cap. Cloth with rickrack
Gracey Ratt Jerome, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1988
11. Baby shoes. Moosehide
Gracey Ratt Jerome, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1988
12. Baby socks. Wool
Gracey Ratt Jerome, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1988
13. Newborn baby carrier. Birch bark with moosehide and yarn
Lena Nottaway, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1988
14. Baby wrap. Cloth with rickrack
Gracey Ratt Jerome, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1988
15. Storage basket. Birch bark with ash rim and spruceroot binding
Lena Nottaway, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1987
16. Basket. Birch bark with ash rim and jackpine root binding
Irene Jerome, Rapid Lake, Quebec 1990
17. "Moose". Carved pine with stain and varnish
Jacob Wawatie, Geneseo, NY 1990
18. "Beavers". Carved pine with stain and varnish
Jacob Wawatie, Geneseo, NY 1990
19. "Bears". Carved pine with stain and varnish
Jacob Wawatie, Geneseo, NY 1990
20. - 25. Six photographs by Michael Greenlar
at Rapid Lake, Quebec 1988 - 1990.

Mexican and Mexican American

1. "Cesar Chavez". Oil on canvas
Juan Cavazos, Buffalo, NY 1988
2. "Fields". Oil on canvas
Juan Cavazos, Buffalo, NY 1988
3. Knife with sheath. Steel and leather
Serafin Muñiz, Musso Camp, Steuben Co., NY 1990
4. Whipo Muñiz, Musso Camp, Steuben Co., NY 1990
5. Whip. Deer leg with tortoise skin
Serafin Muñiz, Musso Camp, Steuben Co., NY 1990
6. Deer horn frayer. Deer antler
Serafin Muñiz, Musso Camp, Steuben Co., NY 1990
7. Photomontage

Monica Garcia, Garcia Camp, Steuben Co., NY 1990
(with Elizabeth Boettger and David Burke)
8. Cut paper streamers. Paper, folded and cut
Aurora Guerrero, Hanson Farm, Ontario Co., NY 1990
9. Photograph by Deborah Fazackerley
Hanson Farm, Ontario Co., NY 1990
10. Paper flowers. Paper with straws
Anel Hernandez, Robson Farm, Ontario Co., NY 1990
11. Paper crowns. Paper with wire, paint, wax, and glitter
Olga Rodriguez, Robson Farm, Ontario Co., NY 1990
12. Quinceñera crown. Wire with artificial flowers, tape and ribbons
Hector Avalos, Sherron Farms, Steuben Co., NY 1985
13. Quinceñera cane. Wire with artificial flowers, tape and ribbons
Hector Avalos, Sherron Farms, Steuben Co., NY 1985
14. - 16. Three photographs by Michael Greenler
Oswego Co., NY 1983

And the Passage Continues...
1. - 6. Six photographs by Bill Cronin, Michael Greenler, and
Roger Smith, Wyoming and Steuben Cos., NY 1973 - 1983

The BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center gratefully acknowledges support from the New York State Council on the Arts: Folk Arts, Literature, and Special Arts Services Programs; Poets and Writers; and the New York Foundation for the Arts, for funding previous research on which this exhibition is based.